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Universal Military Service and Democracy

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UNIVERSAL MILITARY SERVICE AND DEMOCRACY

BY

GEORGE NASMYTH, Ph.D.

AUTHOR OF

"SOCIAL PROGRESS AND THE DARWINIAN THEORY:

A Study of Force as a Factor in Human Relations"

Reprinted from the Journal of Race Development
October, 1916

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Copies of this pamphlet can be obtained from the Massachusetts Branch of the Woman's Peace Party, 421 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass.

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UNIVERSAL MILITARY SERVICE AND DEMOCRACY

By George Nasmyth, Ph.D., author of "Social Progress and the Darwinian Theory: A Study of Force as a Factor in Human Relations"

If any person had predicted two years ago that the people of America would be seriously discussing the adoption of universal military service in 1917, he would have been looked upon as a visionary. But since the outbreak of the war in Europe, the rising tide of reaction which resulted from the international reign of terror; the increasing power of militarism in the world; and the great preparedness campaign which was carried to a successful conclusion in 1915 and 1916, have led, step by step, to an increasing agitation for universal military service, as an essential part of the system of national defense.

The advocates of universal military service are not limited to military officers like General Leonard A. Wood[1] or to partisans of a "big stick" policy in dealing with other nations, like Colonel Roosevelt. The growing importance of the subject is witnessed by the recent accession to their ranks of President Emeritus Charles W. Eliot,[2] widely known as a protagonist of democracy, and of Prof. Ralph Barton Perry, who has attempted to show that democracy has nothing to fear from universal military service.

Moreover, laws have actually been passed in the closing hours of the session of the legislature in New York State providing for military training in the high school

[1] *The Military Obligations of Citizenship.* Princeton University Press, 1915.

[2] "Universal Military Service" by Charles W. Eliot in *World's Work*, Nov., 1916. See also *The Free Man and the Soldier*, by Prof. Ralph Barton Perry, *Scribner's*, 1916.

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and universal military service for all young men between the ages of 18 and 21.[3] Finally the national defense act passed by the United States Congress in July, 1916[4] gives to the military authorities the power to "draft" men into the army whenever voluntary enlistments shall be insufficient, so that universal military service or conscription, to use a more convenient term for the same idea, has been established as a legal principle in the Empire State and in the nation.

The fact that these laws were passed in the closing hours of legislative sessions, without adequate discussion and without complete understanding on the part of the people on the issues involved, makes it inevitable that the debate shall be re-opened in the near future. The principle at issue is fundamental, in a democracy, and the most widespread discussion of the subject should be welcomed by all who believe in the power of an enlightened public opinion to decide rightly on fundamental principles.

Universal Military Service and Preparedness

The case for universal military service rests on entirely different grounds than does the general case for preparedness. If we did not have our other five lines of national defense which protect us from any attack from European or Asiatic powers, there might be some justification in this universal military service in America. But with two oceans, one 3000 and the other 5000 miles in width; the navy, the second largest in the world; sub-marines, which make the transport of large bodies of troops across great distances a most hazardous undertaking; automatic and electric contact mines and coast fortifications, such as have made it impossible for the Allies successfully to land

[3] For the provisions of the Slater Bill and other bills for compulsory military training in New York, see *The Bloody Five*, published by the *New York Call*, 444 Pearl Street, New York City.

[4] For the details of the method by which the "draft" provision was inserted in the National Defense Act, see Representative J. M. Huddleston's speech in the *Congressional Record* reprinted by the American Union Against Militarism, Munsey Building, Washington, D. C.

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troops on the shores of Germany or even Turkey, even when the Allies were backed by a naval force three or four times greater than that of the Central European Powers—with all these first lines of defense, not even the most fearful and extreme of our militarists pretend that an army of seven to ten million men, which the system of universal military service would give us after a few years of building up reserves who had passed through the military machine, would be necessary to repel an actual invasion on American soil. Even Colonel Roosevelt does not demand a standing army of more than 250,000 men and a reserve army of 400,000 men to meet his requirements for an "adequate" national defense, and no one has seriously urged that our preparedness needs require an army of universal service proportions.

But the volunteer system will fail, it is argued. Even the standing army of 250,000 men and the militia of 400,000 provided for in the national defense act cannot be raised by the voluntary method.

An Army of Social Service

If this force is needed, it can be raised by the right kind of an appeal to the American people. This involves a fundamental transformation of an army from its old-world character of a machine trained solely for wholesale murder, to a new world army of social service.[5] An army of labor trained in the work of reforestation, of irrigation, of building great highways, instructed in methods of camp sanitation and effective coöperation; from which every man would come out a more useful member of society and a more productive economic unit, would make a far different appeal to American young men than the standing army on the present system, or even a National Guard of the socially elite. With this employment in useful production should go adequate compensation, just as

[5] See *Invincible America* by Harry G. Traver, published by the Society of Constructive Defense, 50 Church St., New York City, and see also William James' *The Moral Equivalent of War*, published by the American Association for International Conciliation, Sub Station 84, New York City.

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there goes adequate compensation for police work, for the work of firemen and life-savers. Under a really democratic system of social service such as this, there will be no difficulty in finding all the men that are needed, without resort to conscription.

But since the case which can be made out for compulsory service is so weak from the point of view of military necessity, its advocates fall back on other arguments. Universal military service, they claim, will promote democracy; it will unify the nation; it will increase patriotism; it will form greatly needed habits of obedience and discipline. These arguments constitute, in brief, the case for conscription, around which the great debate will rage, and they are so important that they should be subjected to the most searching analysis.

Democracy

Does universal military service involve equal sacrifice on the part of rich and poor alike? If both are killed, of course, both have made the last great sacrifice, and so far as their individual lives are concerned, it is equal. But for the families of the two men the difference is very great. For the family of the poor man, the loss of the bread-winner means that the widow must go out to work, that the children must be deprived of an opportunity for education, that their whole lives must be limited because they did not have the opportunities they would have had if their father had lived. For the rich man, on the contrary, no such sacrifice on the part of his family is involved. His wife is not compelled to go out and work, his children are not deprived of the opportunity of receiving a liberal education. If a conscription of wealth were advocated as a companion measure to a conscription of lives, there might be some justification for the argument on a basis of democracy. But a conscription of lives alone, such as is advocated by the believers in universal military service, is fundamentally unjust, if the family, instead of the individual, is considered as the real unit and the foundation of the nation's life.

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Even if sacrifice of life is not involved, the sacrifice of time required for universal military service imposes an unequal burden upon the rich and the poor. For the rich man, Plattsburg is an enjoyable vacation, and a longer period of military service would not be any great hardship, but for the poor man it means a definite interruption of his economic life, the stopping of his earnings, a postponement of the time when he can afford to marry, an interruption of his difficult task of getting a foothold in his trade or small business. In Germany, it is estimated that the economic loss involved by taking a young man from the farm, for example, is equivalent to about $500 a year, and the father has to hire Polish or Italian laborers to take the place of the son who goes to serve for two years in the Kaiser's army, but for the rich man, military service offers a career, an entrance to the ranks of society, the opening of positions in the government service and educational advantages of technical training in the officers' colleges. No element of equality of sacrifice can be discovered in the two cases.

Those who believe that class distinctions can be broken down and democracy created by regimenting men into masses and forcing them to drill together, have missed the central idea of democracy which is based on the principle of voluntary coöperation, of equality of opportunity, and the abolition of caste privileges. Those who believe that democracy can be imposed from without by force and point to the examples of France and Switzerland, should analyze the conditions in those countries more deeply. As soon as we penetrate below the surface, we find in each of them a great conflict between the forces of militarism and democracy. This conflict rages in all countries where universal military service is established, and it has been revealed in all its bitterness by the vivid, lightning flashes of the Dreyfus affair in France, the Zabern incident in Germany, and the Ulster crisis in the British Army—all parallel instances of successful struggles for the supremacy of the military over the civil powers of government. In France the *revanche* movement which brought about

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the Russo-French Alliance, the three year conscription law of 1912, and the outcome of the Morocco crisis of 1911, all represented victories of the military caste over the forces of democracy and the popular government.

Switzerland has not had an aggressive militarism of the Pan-German type, it is true, but this is not due to any lack of desire on the part of the Swiss military officers who are like military officers the world over. It has been due to the fact that Switzerland is a small country and any propaganda for a career of "national destiny," or the conquest of the world would render its advocates ludicrous. The military spirit, however, and its fundamental opposition to democracy is essentially the same in Switzerland as in Germany or France, as is witnessed, for example, by the testimony of Swiss Social Democrats at the International Socialist Congresses[6] in Stuttgart and other centers.

Everywhere militarism has been the most formidable enemy of democracy. For every million soldiers you must have at least 30,000 officers, and these 30,000 officers must make the military profession their life work. They must cultivate an iron will and a spirit of domination as essential elements of success, and necessarily they chafe with impatience at the discussions and restraints of democracy and the civil powers of government. Altogether they constitute a source of ever present danger to the peace of a nation which is powerful enough to be a menace to the world.

The testimony of representative British and German statesmen—Viscount Bryce, former Ambassador to America, and of Bismarck himself, is illuminating in this connection.

The reason why we have had one hundred years of peace in the English speaking world, according to Viscount Bryce, is because we have had so little militarism in America in the past. In the introduction to Prof. Dunning's book on *The British Empire and the United States* Bryce says

[6] See *The Socialism of Today*, 1916 (Henry Holt and Company), pp. 614. "The Swiss comrades pointed out that their militia was commanded by officers of the ruling class and was used by the bourgeoisie against the working people." Report of the International Socialist Congress at Stuttgart in 1907.

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that during a number of years the American masses would not have opposed war with England but "fortunately . . . . . the country was free from a pernicious military caste which worked such frightful evil in Europe, being indeed driven to desire opportunities for practising the work for which the profession exists."

This is the testimony of a British statesman. On the other hand Bismarck in his *Reflections and Reminiscences*, Chapter XXII, tells us definitely how the Prussian militarists tried to push him into war, how he used this militarist pressure to throw the country into war with Austria in 1866 and with France in 1870, and how he had to resist the powerful militarist pressure towards war in 1867, in 1875 and on other occasions. Bismarck says on page 102, volume II:

> It is natural that in the staff of the army not only younger active officers, but likewise experienced strategists, should feel the need of turning to account the efficiency of the troops led by them, and their own capacity to lead, and of making them prominent in history. It would be a matter of regret if this effect of the military spirit did not exist in the army; the task of keeping its results within such limits at the nations' need of peace can justly claim, is the duty of the political, not the military, heads of the state.
>
> That at the time of the Luxemburg question, during the crisis of 1875, invented by Gortchakoff and France, and even down to the most recent times, the staff and its leaders have allowed themselves to be led astray and to endanger peace, lies in the very spirit of the institution.

If the breakdown of civilization in Europe has anything to teach America, surely it is the danger of any increase in the forces or the philosophy of militarism.

Discipline

The second argument for universal military service is that it will promote discipline. It will teach obedience and respect for authority, it is urged, and these elements are greatly needed in American life. The trouble here is the kind of discipline which military service provides. It is a discipline enforced from without and breaks down as

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soon as the restraining force is removed. The whole object of military training is to secure instantaneous obedience without thought, to make a man a part of an automatic military machine so that if he is ordered to sink the *Lusitania* or destroy the city of Louvain, he will obey instantly and unquestioningly. Such unthinking obedience is far removed from that self-imposed discipline, that respect for laws because they have been enacted by common consent and for the welfare of the people; of freedom of discussion, of speech, of press, of assembly, and of conscience, which are the foundation stones of a self-governing democracy.[7] The history of Prussia illustrates clearly the inevitable results of military discipline. At first, the German people opposed conscription bitterly, but after a few generations of men had been put through the military machine and taught the right kind of obedience, all opposition ceased. Germany became a servile state. More and more power was given into the hands of the military caste, and the events which have occurred since August 1, 1914 have well been called "The Nemesis of docility."

National Unity

The third argument is that it will promote Americanism, it will heal all our divisions of race and nationality, eliminate the hyphen, and unify the American people.

The experience of European nations which have tried to meet similar problems by this method is in flat contradiction to such an assumption. In Austria militarism has reigned with undisputed sway, but universal military service for generations has failed to unite Germans and

[7] See an excellent article on educational aspects of the subject by Prof. John Dewey in *The New Republic*, April 15, 1916. For the objections to military drill as a physical exercise see the testimony of Dudley A. Sargent, M.D., Director of the Hemenway Gymnasium, Harvard University, reprinted in *A Protest against Military Training in Public Schools*, published by the Woman's Peace Party, 116 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago.

See also *Military Training for School Boys*, a symposium by eighty recognized leaders in Education, Physical Training, etc., published at Room 25, 304 Arch Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

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Bohemians, Poles and Czechs and Slavs in the ideal unity which our militarists picture for us as the inevitable result of conscription. In fact, it was a matter of common knowledge that the death of Emperor Franz Joseph was to be the signal for a simultaneous revolution in which all the races of Austria should seek freedom from the unity thus imposed upon them by conscription and force, and only the outbreak of the great war has prevented the disintegration of the Austrian Empire. It may be that war has a unifying influence and that the Austrian Empire will be solidified by the terrible ordeal through which it is passing. That remains to be seen. But in any case, I do not understand the advocates of universal military service to be urging war as a remedy for the lack of unity in our national life. The history of Poland, of the subject races and nationalities of Russia, and of Turkey is a refutation of the claim that national unity can be secured by universal military service.

America needs unity, a national consciousness, and a national will, but no reactionary, militaristic, obsolete, old world instrument, such as conscription, can unify the American people.

Patriotism

A fourth argument for universal military service is that it will promote patriotism, it will teach a man to be ready to sacrifice himself for others and to lay down his life for his country in the service of a great idea. The difficulty with this plan is that there are various kinds of patriotism and the tendency of militarism is to emphasize the wrong kind—the patriotism which corresponds to a narrow nationalism and to Jingoism and the patriotism which is based upon the hatred of other parts of the human race who happen to live the other side of a boundary line. Patriotism and nationalism of the wrong kind are defeating their own ends in Europe. For the sake of our country, as well as for humanity, we must develop another type of patriotism than universal military service has given us in Germany or any of the European countries, a patriotism which will

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look upon America as a part of the world and will take pride in the contributions which America can make to the family of nations. Independence for the sake of independence, a new nation merely that there might be one more army and navy in the world, was no part of the purpose of the founders of the Republic. As Henry Adams said of the great author of the Declaration of Independence:

> Jefferson aspired beyond the ambition of a nationality, and embraced in his view the whole future of man. That the United States should become a nation like France, England or Russia, or should conquer the world like Rome, was no part of his scheme. He wished to begin a new era. Hoping for a time when the world's ruling interests should cease to be local and should become universal; when questions of boundary and nationality should become insignificant; when armies and navies should be reduced to the work of police,—he set himself to the task of governing with this golden age in view. . . . He would not consent to build up a new nationality merely to create more navies and armies, to perpetuate the crimes and follies of Europe; the central government at Washington should not be permitted to indulge in the miserable ambitions that had made the Old World a hell and frustrated the hopes of humanity.

We need greatly a rebirth of true patriotism, just as we need a more fundamental democracy, deeper national unity, more self-discipline, but universal military service is not the panacea for these ills. A true American patriotism can be created only by a return to the great principles of the founders of the Republic, a new vision of the mission of America in the world, a great world task such as the establishment of a League to Enforce Peace, calling for the sacrifice of old provincialisms and outworn traditions in the service of humanity, as a whole. In this way, under the great constructive leadership of a world statesman, America can be unified. In this way we may recover our vision of democracy and we may lead the world into a higher patriotism, purified in the fiery furnace of this world crisis. By these new paths which lead out into a future full of hope and service, it may be that in the coming years the soul of America will be born again into a new and larger life, but never by the path of conscription, of fear and servile obedience. and the mechanical methods of militarism.

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A much deeper principle is involved than is usually discussed in connection with universal military service: What kind of a society do we wish to live in? For, if the principle of compulsion is accepted in the case of military service, it must logically be accepted for service in munition factories, on the railroads, in coal mines and in all the industrial and economic life upon which modern wars depend. In other words, once having granted the principle of compulsion on the ground of military necessity, all the fundamental principles of democracy must be sacrificed and our country must be "Prussianized" from within. Freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and freedom of the press[8] are all opposed to military effectiveness and must disappear step by step if freedom of conscience, the advance trench of democracy, is carried by the militarists; for in the last analysis, universal military service means conscription of conscience.[9]

The new political persecution represented by the adoption of conscription differs from the old religious persecution in this: whereas, in the Middle Ages the heretic could save his life by keeping his mouth closed and his opinions to himself, in the modern political persecution of Twentieth Century militarism, the heretic who may believe that an aggressive foreign policy is unjust, or a war which his country has declared is unprovoked, is compelled not only to keep his opinions to himself, but is forced to go out and kill his fellowmen against whom he may have no cause for enmity whatever.

America is the only great nation left in the world in which militarism is not enthroned and the principle of conscription established. In order to defend our institutions and our democracy from imaginary dangers from without, we are urged to surrender to this much more real and formidable enemy of militarism and conscription

[8] The War Department is now advocating legislation giving the military authorities power to establish a censorship over the press in time of war.

[9] See Norman Angell's admirable article on the psychological aspect of universal military service as a conscription of conscience in *The New Republic*, April 8, 1916.

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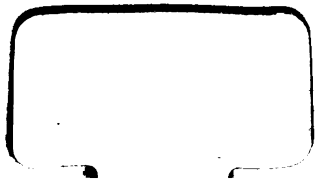

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